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Environment Committee Testimony Feb. 18, 2009 for RB 6359

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

My name is David Bingham, here on behalf of the Sierra Club and its 12,000 members. I rise in support of **Raised Bill 6397**. This bill enables a local option to impose a buyer's fee of up to 1% of the sales price on local real estate conveyances.

Funds from the fee would be deposited in a dedicated local account for funding conservation projects, including

Open Space

Farmland preservation

Energy conservation

Brownfield cleanup

Air and water quality

Alternative transportation

How does your town pay for these projects? If your community is like most in the State, passing budgets is a problem. Conservation projects tend to be cut or postponed. Local property tax rates are already a heavy burden. If it means a higher mill rate, funding often becomes unavailable. This is despite the fact that, with regard to the environment, we know "every stitch in time, saves nine!"

There is a tendency to run to the State to fund these important projects. But the State, too, is constrained by a budget shortfall. In a world beset by global warming and resource depletion, such funding is urgently needed to protect and restore our land air and water. But the State can't do it all.

This bill requires no State expense or fiscal note. These funds will be levied and spent locally. However, where there is a significant regional benefit, the "Green Fund" approach would provide leverage for state, federal and private grants. Such funds thus would have a multiplier effect, bringing funds into the State as well as local communities.

Other states have had great success with this approach. On Long Island, Cape Cod and Block Island communities have found the conveyance fee a popular way to provide funding for conservation. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been raised in the past decade. Note that realtors and builders in those communities have had a value added that increases their income on each transaction, while controlling sprawl. "Green" communities are very attractive to homeowners and businesses alike.

This fosters "smart growth," using a funding "carrot" instead of a regulatory "stick." No mandates are here, but simply the offer of a useful funding tool that should be available to every community.

In closing, I note that Rep. Wright's bill **HB 5264** is also before you. Her bill would help assure that land that is purchased for Open Space does not get diverted for development sometime in the future. I urge that this companion bill also be approved.

Thank you!